

CALAIS TOWN MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, March 7, 2017

The 2017 Calais Town Meeting was called to order by Moderator Gus Seelig at the Calais Elementary School on Tuesday, March 7, 2017, at 10:22 a.m., following the conclusion of the Calais Elementary School Meeting which began at 9:00 a.m. The ballot boxes had been officially opened by the town clerk at 7:00 a.m. and remained open until 7:00 p.m.

ARTICLE 1. To elect a Moderator: Donna Fitch presided over the election of a moderator. A motion was made to nominate Gus Seelig. The motion was seconded and unanimously approved. Gus reminded those present that the meeting will follow Robert's Rules of Order.

Gus introduced Selectboard Chair, Denise Wheeler, who thanked everyone for their attendance and those who were critical in coordinating the meeting, including Chris Tuller, head of maintenance at the school. Denise thanked Toby Talbot and Scott Bassage for their past service to the town in various capacities and, most recently, for serving on the Selectboard. Toby will continue as Operations Manager, overseeing the highway department. Scott will continue on the Historic Preservation Commission and the restoration of the Town Hall. Denise recognized Judy Robert, Assistant Town Clerk, and Donna Fitch, Town Clerk and Treasurer, for their service over the past few years. Denise noted that Calais has over 100 volunteers serving the town on various committees, commissions and individual positions.

ARTICLE 2. To hear the reports of town boards and officers: Stephanie Kaplan, C-Chair of the Conservation Commission, shared information about the last phase of the two-phase Natural Resources Inventory (NRI). Copies are available on loan at the town office and online at the town web site. Larry Bush announced a presentation of the NRI on March 9, 7:00 pm., at the Maple Corner Community Center.

Kristina Bielenberg noted that her name is not listed as Justice of the Peace in the town report.

ARTICLE 3. To elect the following town officers from the floor:

Trustee of Public Funds - Donna Fitch nominated Rod Buck for a 3-year term. The motion was made to close nominations and have the Clerk cast one ballot for Rod Buck. Motion was seconded and carried unanimously.

Cemetery Commissioner - Scott Bassage nominated Fletcher Dean for a 5-year term. The motion was made to close nominations and have the Clerk cast one ballot for Fletcher Dean. Motion was seconded and carried unanimously.

Agent to Convey Real Estate - Denise Wheeler nominated Donna Fitch for the 1-year term. The motion was made to close nominations and have the Clerk cast one ballot for Donna Fitch. Motion was seconded and carried unanimously.

Law Agent and Grand Juror - Lou Cherry nominated Tina Bielenberg for both Law Agent and Grand Juror for 1-year terms. The motion was made to close nominations and have the Clerk cast one ballot for Tina for each position. Motion was seconded and carried unanimously.

ARTICLE 4. Shall the voters approve total highway and general fund expenditures of \$1,579,980 of which \$1,259,100 shall be raised by taxes and \$320,880 by non-tax revenue?

Rick Kehne moved to approve this article, and it was seconded. Donna Fitch explained that some items that had previously been voted by separate articles are now included in the budget, for example, the swim program allocation and reserve funds.

Michael Fullerton asked for clarification on the Hayden Road Bridge project. Toby Talbot explained the Selectboard discussed the project in open session at Selectboard meetings. Michael moved to reduce the budget by \$36,000; seconded by Tammy Leno. Craig Line asked what would happen to the grant money if the bridge project did not move forward. Toby explained the money would be turned down by the Selectboard. The cost to the town is approximately \$3,600, as the state pays 90% of the project. Tina Golon asked whether the grant money could be used for other projects. Toby responded it cannot. Tammy Leno expressed her opposition to the project.

Rob Richert asked for clarification regarding how the town plow trucks use the bridge. The road crew uses this bridge when plowing Upper Road and North Calais Road. The school bus also uses the bridge. Currently, with the bridge closed, the school bus cannot pick up children in North Calais. Peter Harvey shared his concern that rebuilding the bridge will change the character of the bridge and of North Calais. He noted that two years ago there was much opposition to this bridge. Marge Garfield clarified that the bridge is on an active road. Dan Singleton said that since the bridge is on a Class 3 road, the town is obligated to maintain the road. John Brabant reiterated this fact and stated that much discussion has occurred to ensure that the upgrade of the bridge does not change the character of North Calais. Though guardrails are required, the aesthetics would not be negatively affected. A motion to call the question on the amendment was seconded and carried. Gus called for a vote on the amendment to reduce the budget by \$36,000. The amendment was defeated.

Mack Gardner-Morse stated that the increase in the budget is unacceptable, and he cannot vote in support of it. A question was asked for clarification about the highway portion of the budget. Toby Talbot explained that the cost of necessities such as sand and gravel has increased. A question was asked regarding how the Selectboard intends to retire indebtedness. Toby explained the intention to retire an operating budget *deficit* from the past two years over the next five years as differentiated from *indebtedness* over the years to pay for town expenses such as equipment purchases. There was discussion about the cost of borrowing money vs. not taking out loans.

Tina Golon asked if the town is looking into decreasing the cost of health insurance benefits. Donna Fitch explained town employees pay 5% of the health insurance premium. Responding to a question about the proposed position of Selectboard Administrator, Donna explained the town Treasurer will be performing the statutory duties of town Treasurer. The Clerk will be performing the statutory duties of town Clerk. Other tasks that have fallen on the Clerk over the past years will be performed by the Selectboard Administrator who will also support the Selectboard. This position may be part-time. Per statute, an Assistant Town Clerk must be appointed by the Town Clerk. The Assistant Clerk is budgeted for part-time.

Responding to a question about the professional auditor in the Charter, Denise Wheeler explained Vermont statute requires the town have an auditor. There have been no volunteers for this position, therefore, the Charter proposes hiring a part-time auditor to work with the Treasurer and fulfill the duties of town Auditors. A motion to call the question was seconded and passed. The article passed.

ARTICLE 5. Shall the voters appropriate \$25,760 for the Kellogg Hubbard Library for its operating expenses? Craig Line moved the article, and it was seconded. Craig, who serves on the Board of the Kellogg Hubbard Library, noted the amount reflects a request of about \$16 per capita. Geraldine Gilman moved to amend Article 5 to \$22,760. The motion was seconded. Gus called for a vote on the amendment. The motion did not pass. Gus called for a vote on the original motion, and the article passed.

ARTICLE 6. Shall the voters appropriate \$1,607 for the Cross Vermont Trail's Winooski Bridge Project? The article was moved and seconded. Reed Cherington explained the bridge project is a good deal for the community, and he asked for the support of the community. Colin O'Neil expressed his support. A motion was made to call the question, which was seconded and passed. Gus called for a vote on this article and it was approved.

Janet Ancel, Representative to the state legislature, commented on the large number of attendees. She spoke about the new administration at the state and national levels and the resulting anxious uncertainty, and the challenges of balancing the state budget. Mary Alice Proffitt expressed her support for Janet.

She stated this will be a challenging year for those in political office and reminded Janet to reach out if needed for the support of Calais residents. Jan Ohlsson encouraged Janet to research working toward the school tax rate being connected to income as opposed to property. Rick Kehne asked whether there is any progress toward changing the Act 46 legislation. Janet stated she has proposed legislation to provide more flexibility around alternative structures, as well as more time for school districts to work this out. Janet received a hearty round of applause.

ARTICLE 7. Shall the voters appropriate \$2,400 as matching funds for a grant to identify opportunities in East Calais Village and create a practical action plan to increase economic activity through public visioning, greater use of community assets, safer bicycle and pedestrian pathways, historic trails, improved parking, and links along Vt. Rte. 14? The town did not receive this grant so Denise Wheeler moved to pass over this article. Seconded by John Brabant, the motion to pass over carried.

ARTICLE 8. Shall the voters appropriate the indicated sums as requested by the following organizations in Calais and the Central Vermont area, as follows:

Adamant Community Club	\$3,000
Calais Community Connections	\$1,000
Capstone Community Action	\$ 300
Central Vermont Basic Education	\$1,000
Central Vermont Council on Aging	\$1,400
Central Vermont Development Corp	\$ 500
Central Vermont Home Health and Hospice	\$3,200
Central Vermont Memorial Civic Center	\$ 800
Circle	\$ 700
Family Center of Washington County	\$ 500
Friends of Winooski River	\$ 300
Good Beginnings of Central Vermont	\$ 300
Green Mountain Transit Agency	\$ 859
Greenup Vermont	\$ 100
Home Share Now	\$ 600
Montpelier Senior Center	\$3,200
Old West Church	\$ 100
Peoples Health and Wellness Clinic	\$1,500
Sexual Assault Crisis Team	\$ 200
Twin Valley Senior Center	\$3,000
Vermont Association for the Blind	\$ 650
Vermont Center for Independent Living	\$ 415
Washington County Diversion Program	\$ 300
Washington County Youth Service Bureau	\$ 500
Woodbury/Calais Foodshelf	\$ 300
Washington County Mental Health Services	<u>\$1,400</u>
 TOTAL	 \$26,124

The article was moved and seconded. Rick Winston explained the latest project at the Adamant Community Club is to build a handicap accessible ramp. Mary Ann Miller asked whether a committee had reviewed the requests as in past years. It had not. Jeff Fannon pointed out a discrepancy between \$500 in this article for Washington County Diversion Program and the amount in the budget (\$300). Donna Fitch will verify. (Upon verification, the request is for \$300.) Tammy Leno expressed discontent with the amount allotted to Greenup (\$100) versus other amounts. She moved to amend the article to increase Greenup by \$6000.00 and to give \$100 each to Twin Valley Senior Center and Montpelier Senior Center. The motion was seconded. Chauntelle Eckhaus expressed her support for senior citizens. Donna Fitch explained that a grant is received for Greenup Day which covers some of the town's Greenup Day expenses. Fletcher Dean expressed his support to increase can and bottle deposits to 25 cents to help toward the effort of recycling versus adding to landfills. Gail Graham encouraged more people to participate in Greenup. Dot Naylor would like to figure out a way to have a pick-up site at Maple Corner for Greenup. A motion was made to call the question. It was seconded and passed. Gus called for a vote on the amendment. The amendment was voted down. Jan Ohlsson noted that Article 13 makes the Adamant Community Club tax exempt. Gus called for a vote on the original article. The article passed with no changes.

ARTICLE 9. Shall the voters authorize the Selectboard to borrow an amount not to exceed \$281,789, for a term not to exceed five years, for the purpose of retiring the FY 2015 and FY 2016 budget deficits? A motion was made and seconded to approve Article 9. John Brabant spoke about unexpected legal fees the Selectboard faced in the past two years. Rick Kehne applauded the effort of the Selectboard, especially in cases upholding town zoning laws. Cynthia Johnson expressed her gratitude to the Selectboard for taking on the legal issues involving VTEL. John Brabant noted an anonymous donation of \$13,000.00 had been received to help alleviate the legal costs. He explained Vermont statute requires the Selectboard to address a deficit within two years. A motion was made to call the question. It was seconded and carried. Gus called for a vote on the article. The article passed.

ARTICLE 10. Shall the voters authorize the Selectboard to borrow an amount not to exceed \$100,000.00, for a term not to exceed five years, for the purchase of a used excavator and a new trailer for that excavator? Denise Wheeler moved to approve. The motion was seconded. Toby Talbot explained the purchase is part of the long-term capital plan regarding equipment purchase. Stephanie Kaplan expressed concern about larger equipment creating bigger and deeper ditches and wider roads. Toby stated the road crew follows the roads standards that have been established; the proposed purchase is a larger, more efficient piece of equipment to replace a 20-year-old excavator. He assured that the roads would not be made wider nor the ditches made deeper. This particular used excavator had been rented by Calais previously from a local vendor. Road Commissioner, Alfred Larrabee, provided details about the excavator. Discussion followed about indebtedness for town equipment. Tina Bielenberg urged the Selectboard to set aside money in the Capital Fund to not have to borrow as this is the intention of a capital fund. A community member thanked the town road crew. Doug Lilley stated that diesel trucks are intended to operate longer; he suggested the town sell its used equipment rather than trading the equipment toward a new purchase. A motion to call the question was seconded and carried. Gus called for a vote on the article. The article passed.

ARTICLE 11. Shall the voters exempt from taxation real property of the Maple Corner Community Center, Inc., for a period of five years, pursuant to 32 V.S.A. §3840? A motion was made and seconded to approve the article. The article passed.

ARTICLE 12. Shall the voters exempt from taxation real property of the Calais Community Recreation Association, Inc., for a period of five years, pursuant to 32 V.S.A. §3840? A motion was made and seconded to approve the article. The article passed.

ARTICLE 13. Shall the voters exempt from taxation real property of the Adamant Community Club, Inc., for a period of five years, pursuant to 32 V.S.A. §3840? A motion was made and seconded to approve the article. The article passed.

ARTICLE 14. Shall the voters exempt from taxation real property of the Aldrich Memorial Association, Inc., for a period of five years, pursuant to 32 V.S.A. §3840? A motion was made and seconded to approve the article. The article passed.

ARTICLE 15. Shall property taxes be paid to the Treasurer, as provided by law and without discount, in two equal installments, as follows: The first installment will be due on or before 4:00 p.m. 30 days after the tax bills are mailed, but not earlier than August 1, 2017, and the second installment will be due on or before 4:00 p.m. on November 15, 2017. A motion was made and seconded. The article passed.

ARTICLE 16. Shall a grace period be established after the property tax due dates of payments of property taxes as provided in 32 V.S.A. §1674(3)(B)? The grace period for the first payment will be two weeks after the due date. The grace period for the second payment will extend through November 29, 2017. Taxes become delinquent on November 30, 2017, and a 7% penalty is applied. A motion was made and seconded. Doug Lilly moved to set the penalty rate lower to 5%. The motion was seconded. Delinquent Tax Collector Nedene Martin explained the effort that is made to help delinquent tax payers catch up on payments. She shared statistics (page 37 in the town report) showing delinquent taxes have been significantly eliminated or reduced over the years. Tammy Leno asked the town to come together and find ways to help people stay in their homes; she stated that tax sales are cruel. A motion to call the question was seconded and passed. Gus called for a vote on the amendment. The amendment did not pass. Gus called for a vote on Article 16. The article passed.

ARTICLE 17. Shall the Town of Calais be a Town of Sanctuary for refugees and asylum-seekers

and not participate in Federal efforts to deport undocumented immigrants? A motion was made and seconded to approve the article. A group of community members spoke in favor of the article, referencing the 10th Amendment. Geraldine Gilman expressed her concern about becoming a sanctuary town. Discussion followed with others expressing support for the article. Gus called for a vote, and the article passed.

ARTICLE 18. To transact any other business that may legally come before the meeting. Greenup Day is Saturday May 6. April 3rd is the deadline to register dogs.

The following Articles will be voted by Australian Ballot:

ARTICLE 19. To elect the following Town officers by Australian ballot:

- John Brabant was elected to the Selectboard for the balance of his 2-year term (1 year).
- Sharon Winn Fannon was elected to the Selectboard for a 3-year term.
- Robert Richert, Jr. was elected to the Selectboard for a 2-year term.
- Janice Ohlsson was elected as Lister, a 3-year term.
- Judy Fitch Robert was elected Town Clerk, a 3-year term.
- Donna Fitch was elected Town Treasurer, a 3-year term.

ARTICLE 20. Shall the Town of Calais Land Use and Development Regulations which were adopted by the voters of the Town on March 1, 2005 and last amended on March 4, 2014 be further amended as recommended to the voters after public hearings by the Calais Planning Commission on Tuesday, November 15, 2016 and by the Calais Selectboard on Monday, December 19, 2016? Article 20 passed by Australian ballot: 301 YES to 98 NO.

ARTICLE 21. Shall the Town approve, and submit to the Vermont General Assembly for enactment, the municipal charter proposed by the Selectboard? The proposed municipal charter is available for inspection at the Calais Town Office during regular office hours and on the Town's website at www.calaisvermont.gov Article 21 passed by Australian ballot: 326 YES to 94 NO.

The meeting adjourned at 1:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Stoudt, Selectboard Recording Secretary

Donna Fitch, Town Clerk

Rose Pelchuck, Selectboard

Denise Wheeler, Selectboard